

# The Dignity Project Fellowship: Youth Leadership Institute

## 2023-2024 Program Overview

*“Our innermost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, a Christian a better Christian.”*

-Mahatma Gandhi

*“Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world”*

-Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The Dignity Project Fellowship is designed to train outstanding *high school sophomores, juniors and seniors*—18-20 fellows total annually—from Greater Boston to serve as interreligious and cross-cultural leaders, with the capacity to engage the diversity of our city (and broader society) with thoughtfulness, skill, and care. In constructing this intentionally diverse group, we will recruit a passionate cohort of young people from different spiritual and ethical backgrounds, including those who identify as “religious” and “secular.” We will also pay careful attention to other axes of difference, including race, class, and gender. In developing this initiative, we are working collaboratively with leaders and educators from various houses of worship, schools, and civic organizations throughout the city.

The overarching goal of the initiative is to cultivate a network of thoughtful and skilled young leaders able to build bridges of understanding and cooperation, and to stand up to bigotry and hate. The ethical/spiritual foundation for the project is the ancient and enduring notion that every human being is of inestimable worth, and that a society thrives when people learn to honor each other’s similarities *and* differences. In this moment of increased polarization and resurgent intolerance, we need to help young people develop the ability and sensibility to find common ground when possible, and to engage in *dignified* discourse and debate when necessary. This is particularly important for our target audience, as these teens move closer to adulthood, preparing to leave home for college, university, and work life.

### **Program Structure (see calendar below):**

Each participant will actively engage in *all* of the activities listed below.

- Opening Retreat (2 nights, 3 days in Dedham, MA)\*
- 4 Monthly In-Person Gatherings including a Final Program Reflection and Evaluation Session (3.5 hours at Hebrew College in Newton, MA)
- 2 Religious or Community Site Visits along with a written reflection (3 hours each)
- Mid-Year Retreat (1 night/1.5 days in Newton, MA)

- Independent Project Group work (2-3 hours TBD in personal time)
- Closing Retreat and Celebration (1 night/1.5 days in Newton, MA)\*\*

\* Please plan to block off the full days of the Opening Retreat (Monday-Wednesday, August 14th-16th). Although we plan to meet overnight at a local retreat center, due to shifting COVID requirements, we may need to alter our plans. Regardless, we will meet each day.

\*\* Participants will work in small groups—with mentorship—to share their learning with the broader community where we will end our Closing Retreat with Fellows constructing, hosting, and leading a Dignity Project gathering for peers and family. In large and small groups, Fellows will design a Dignity Project space inspired by the five values of the Dignity Project—giving our guests an interactive experience in engaging across lines of difference. Time in our monthly gatherings will be dedicated to develop this . We believe that the fellows’ experience will be significantly enhanced by embedding an action-oriented component into the program that grows directly from their learning together.

### **Learning Goals:**

*The overarching goal of this initiative is to provide the fellows with the experience, skills, and support to act as bold and empathic leaders; committed to the flourishing of an ethos of human dignity within and across their communities.*

- Forge personal relationships with peers and mentors from different religious and cultural contexts
- Explore the values and beliefs—religious and secular—that support participants’ commitments to creating an equitable and compassionate society
- Learn how to engage in constructive dialogue and work with a diverse team of individuals
- Study the lives and work of “upstanders” from American and world history, including the sources of wisdom that inspired, informed, and guided them
- Develop communication skills for use in formal and informal educational settings

### **Program Calendar—2023-2024\***

\* Programs will be held in-person. The Dignity Project and Hebrew College, our institutional home, will monitor and follow local public health recommendations for safe gatherings. If deemed safer due to potential COVID surges, we will move our scheduled events to Zoom or provide masks or COVID tests to ensure the safety of the whole community.

- Opening Retreat: Monday–Wednesday (2 nights, 3 days)
  - August 14th-August 16th
- 4 In-Person Gatherings: Sundays, 2:00-5:30 pm:
  - September 10th, 2023
  - November 19th, 2023
  - December 10th, 2023

- January 21st, 2024
- 1 Mid-Year Retreat: Saturday PM-Sunday (1.5 days/1 night)
  - October 14th-15th, 2023
- 1-2 Project Group Meetings, on Zoom or in-person (date/time TBD January-February)
- 2 Possible In-person Site Visits\*:
  - Sundays: specific dates and locations TBD as Fellows sign up to host
- Closing Retreat: Saturday PM-Sunday, 1.5 Days/1 Night
  - February 10th-11th, 2024

\*We will be providing several site visit dates/times/locations. Fellows are required to choose and attend at least 2 site visits to attend as a guest or can also choose 1 site visit to attend and volunteer to host other Fellows at their own religious or cultural community for a site visit.

### **Transportation:**

We can provide some help with transportation to and from fellowship events *for those who need assistance*. Depending on the location of fellows, we will have two designated pick-up spots. Your commitment is in making all events including to program location or to pick-up spots.

### **Fellowship Stipends:**

Each participant will receive a **\$750 stipend** upon completion of the program. To receive the full Fellowship stipend of \$750, Fellows must attend and participate in **all** the Fellowship events and activities with the exception of one absence. After one non-emergency absence, stipends will be lowered to reflect the Fellow's record of attendance and participation. This ensures fairness to the entire Fellowship community.

### **Program Staff:**

- Shelton Oakley Hersey, Dignity Project Program Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- Rafi Ellenson, Dignity Project Assistant Program Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- Rev. Tom Reid, Associate Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- Rabbi Or Rose, Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- 4 Dignity Project Mentors from local graduate theological schools and programs

### **For More Information:**

Rafi Ellenson, Assistant Program Director

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Shelton Oakley Hersey, Program Director

[soakleyhersey@hebrewcollege.edu](mailto:soakleyhersey@hebrewcollege.edu) (on leave March through April)

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